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DOLPH HAERING/MUNICH

POLISH PRIESTS IN WEST GERMANY

ANNCR:

A GROWING NUMBER OF ROMAN CATHOLIC PRIESTS FROM POLAND IS PERFORMING RELIGIOUS DUTIES IN WEST GERMANY TO HELP OVERCOME THIS WESTERN COUNTRY'S SHORTAGE OF PRIESTS. VOA'S DOLPH HAERING HAS THIS BACKGROUND REPORT.

VOICE:

IN WEST GERMANY RIGHT NOW, THERE ARE NOT ENOUGH CATHOLIC PRIESTS. AND, ALTHOUGH THE NUMBER OF SEMINARY STUDENTS IS GROWING, MOST OF THE SEMINARIANS, AFTER THEY ARE ORDAINED, SEEM TO PREFER WORKING AT SUCH JOBS AS RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTORS IN SCHOOLS, RATHER THAN AS PARISH PRIESTS.

ONE MEASURE THE CHURCH HAS TAKEN HAS BEEN THE CONSOLIDATION OF SMALLER PARISHES, AS WELL AS OCCASIONAL RECRUITING FROM SPAIN, HOLLAND, OR YUGOSLAVIA, OF PRIESTS WHO HAVE STUDIED IN WEST GERMANY. BUT MOST COUNTRIES -- HAVING A SHORTAGE OF PRIESTS THEMSELVES -- ARE RELUCTANT TO LET THEM GO TO FOREIGN COUNTRIES.

COMMUNIST POLAND, HOWEVER, HAS MORE PRIESTS THAN IT THINKS IT NEEDS. IN THAT PREDOMINANTLY CATHOLIC COUNTRY, THERE ARE NEARLY THREE TIMES AS MANY CANDIDATES FOR THE CLOTH AS THE RELIGIOUS SEMINARIES CAN TAKE. THIS MAKES IT POSSIBLE FOR WEST GERMAN CATHOLIC AUTHORITIES TO HIRE POLISH PRIESTS. BY NOW, MORE THAN ONE HUNDRED POLISH CLERGYMEN ARE RENDERING RELIGIOUS SERVICES TO WEST GERMAN CATHOLICS OR TO POLISH EMIGRANTS.

THEIR TRANSFER PROCEEDS QUIETLY AND IS LABELLED "EXCHANGE PROGRAM" OR "LANGUAGE STUDY" IN ORDER TO KEEP IT OUT OF POLITICS. ALTHOUGH THE POLISH GOVERNMENT IS LESS RIGID IN ITS RELATIONS WITH THE CHURCH THAN SOME OTHER EAST EUROPEAN COMMUNIST COUNTRIES,

POLISH AUTHORITIES ARE AWARE THAT MANY PRIESTS WANT TO LEAVE THE COUNTRY FOR LACK OF FULL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM.

WARSAW AUTHORITIES POSE NO DIFFICULTIES. AND THE HIGHEST-RANKING POLISH PRIEST IN WEST GERMANY -- PRELATE JULIUSZ JANUSZ -- BELIEVES THE POLISH GOVERNMENT IS NOT UNHAPPY ABOUT THE PRIESTS LEAVING POLAND.

OFFICIALLY, THE PRIESTS ARE PUT ON LEAVE STATUS FOR A LIMITED TIME BY THEIR SUPERIORS. BUT IT HAS NEVER BEEN A PROBLEM TO EXTEND THESE LEAVES.

SOME OF THESE GUEST-PRIESTS ARE UNHAPPY WITH THEIR PERCEPTION THAT CATHOLIC PRIESTS DO NOT ENJOY AS MUCH RESPECT AMONG THE POPULATION AS IN POLAND. BUT ONE OF THEM, (ZDESLAW DOBIECKI) WHO HAS BEEN IN WEST GERMANY FOR THE PAST FIVE YEARS, SAYS THE IMPORTANT POINT IS THAT HE AND MOST OF HIS COLLEAGUES ARE URGENTLY NEEDED TO PROVIDE RELGIOUS CARE TO EMIGRANTS FROM POLAND, SERVING AS A BRIDGE BETWEEN THEIR OLD AND NEW HOMES.

WJL/RCS